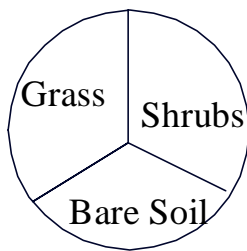




THE COVEY HEADQUARTERS

Volume 5 Issue 1 Spring 2006

This newsletter is aimed at cooperators and sportspeople in Missouri to provide information on restoring quail. This is a joint effort of the Missouri Department of Conservation, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, University of Missouri Extension and Quail Unlimited. If you would like to be removed from this mailing list or have suggestions for future articles please contact jeff.powelson@mdc.mo.gov or 816-232-6555 x122 or write to the address shown.



The name of this newsletter is taken from an old concept.....that a quail covey operates from a headquarters (shrubby cover). If the rest of the covey's habitat needs are nearby, a covey should be present. We are encouraging landowners to manage their quail habitat according to this concept. Use shrubs as the cornerstone for your quail management efforts. Manage for a diverse grass, broadleaf weed and legume mixture and provide bare ground with row crops, food plots or light disking **right next to** the shrubby area.

Missouri Quail Conservationists Score a Threepat

Jim Low, Missouri Department of Conservation

If the West Central Missouri Chapter of Quail Unlimited (QU) were a cartoon character, it would be Mighty Mouse. For the third year in a row, this group of bobwhite fanatics of Cass County has dominated the habitat field with implementation. The key to their success is one-on-one contact with landowners.

Receiving the National Quail Habitat Award once is a noteworthy achievement. Each year QU's national office scores all 300 chapters from coast to coast according to the habitat work they accomplish. Chapters are divided into three divisions, according to how much money they raise at their annual banquets.

In most cases, this helps small, rural groups, ensuring that they don't have to compete against huge, wealthy chapters from big cities. In the West Central Missouri Chapter's case, however, it just holds them back. "They are far and away the most active and productive chapter in the United States," said QU National Habitat Coordinator Roger Wells. "They score higher than any chapter in the nation, regardless of size. They still would have won if they had been competing against chapters that raise nearly \$150,000."

How does a QU chapter with a mere 125 members and annual banquet income of \$3,650 achieve those results? "These guys understand that lots of landowners are needed to make quail conservation happen, and they spend a lot of time knocking on doors," said QU Great Plains Regional Director Jef Hodges, who works out of his home in Clinton. "They don't just throw money at the problem. They build relationships with people. They get to know them, find out about their needs and ambitions for their land and find ways to meet those goals while making places for quail to live. They also know the value of partnerships."

To date, the West Central Missouri Chapter's partners include 226 landowners, plus the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Farm Service Agency. These agencies bring knowledge, equipment and state and federal conservation incentive money to the table.

The measure of such partnerships' power is easy to see on the ground around Harrisonville. Since 2000 the West Central Missouri QU Chapter has refurbished more than 39 miles of hedgerows to make them more hospitable to quail. The benefits of this work go far beyond the actual acreage on which the work is done. Quail

experts say the variety of cover types created in hedgerow renovation improves the quail-carrying ability of approximately 10 surrounding acres for each acre under management.

Tom Lampe, chairman of the West Central Missouri QU, said one of the most exciting things about his chapter's effort is the way it has caught on among landowners. His group provided signs for cooperators to put up touting their efforts. It wasn't long before neighbors began asking how they could get more quail on their land.

Always do MORE than the MINIMUM

If you have CRP acres or participate in any USDA conservation programs, you've heard of minimums. For virtually any conservation practice there are minimum sizes, widths or lengths stated in the practice standard. For instance, the minimum size of food plot you can plant on CRP acres is $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre. Unfortunately, many people miss the "minimum" part and think they can only plant a $\frac{1}{4}$ acre food plot when in actuality they could plant up to 25% of a CRP field up to 5 acres into food plot. You can plant up to 10% of your total CRP contract acres into food plots, which means you can have a lot of food plot acres! Food plots are a great way to add brood rearing habitat and winter cover to CRP ground so I encourage landowners to **maximize** their food plot acres on CRP. A good way to cut costs is to plant half your food plot acres each year and leave the other half idle. This creates a great rotation of excellent brood rearing cover and winter food source that upland birds need, plus you save money on seed and labor to plant the plots. Think about planting several new larger food plots in your rotation this year to maximize your management.

Edge feathering, shrub planting, and downed tree structures for covey headquarters are three practices with a well-defined minimum size. Many people are familiar with the 1/10 acre per 40 acre minimum size for planned covey headquarters. While this minimum is fine, it would be even better to plan on 1/10 acre per 5 acres or even more. The minimum size of each covey headquarter is 1500 square feet. Why not do twice the minimum? Bigger CHQ's will provide more cover for bigger coveys. Downed tree structures require a minimum of three trees in the pile, but the addition of 4 or 5 trees would add greatly to each structure. Shrubby cover is very important for bobwhite and many farms have enough woody edge to do edge feathering for years and years. You really can't do too much edge feathering.

Buffer practices such as CP21, CP29, CP33, etc. all have a minimum width stated in the practice standard. Most minimum widths are around 25-30 ft. which is better than nothing, but why not install 50 ft., 100 ft., or the maximum width? The additional width increases the available nesting habitat and creates a wider area for predators to hunt, which increases the chance of survival for nests.

Bobwhite can survive in areas with the minimum amount of management, but they would thrive in areas with wide grassy field borders, large covey headquarters, and 1 acre food plots scattered about the farm. Remember, the next time you are given a choice to do the minimum required amount or more, always do **MORE** than the minimum!

Quail Unlimited hires Technical Service Biologist for Northeast Missouri

Through a partnership agreement with the Missouri Department of Conservation, Quail Unlimited has hired Lisa Potter to work one-on-one with private landowners, to assist and develop management plans that will help quail, grassland birds, and other upland wildlife species. Potter's primary responsibility will be working with landowners that are interested in early successional habitat, especially those located in the Quail Focus Area just west of Paris. Contact Lisa at the Monroe County USDA Office in Paris - 660-327-4117 ext. 3.

Did You Know???

These ears of corn were collected from opposite sides of a wooded fenceline. One side of the fenceline was buffered with CP33 and the larger ears produced next to the buffer estimated at 168 bushel/acre.

The smallest ears of corn were picked on the edge of the crop field on the opposite side of the fenceline where no buffer was present. These smaller ears were estimated to produce 45 bushel/acre. In both cases the input costs were the same to produce both ears of corn.

Nearly every farm field in Missouri has low yield areas. Enroll these areas into the Continuous CRP program. As of mid-Dec. Missouri has 6,100 acres enrolled in the CP33 field border program. There are an additional 6-7,000 acres in applications waiting to be processed. Time may be running out on the CP33 field border practice. Missouri can only enroll up to 20,000 acres into the program. Visit your local FSA office and sign up today. Participants get a \$100/acre signup bonus and a CRP rental payment for 10 years. New CRP rental rates went into effect in early December. Some soil rental rates went up while others went down. All new CRP contracts will use the new rates. If you have any questions about the new rates contact your local FSA office.

Build it and they will come...

I visited my less than 40 acre family farm at about 0930 on opening day to see if some outdoor brethren had not understood the prose on my many, freshly posted No Hunting/MDC Licensed Dog Training Area signs. Seeing no trespassers, I walked the property, without dogs and gun, and succeeded in flushing four mature quail in the common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) plot. This food source was created by roto-tilling and fertilizing with nitrogen after the March 2005 burn. I also busted one cottontail in the foxtail patch that had invaded my May 2005 planting of sideoats grama, little bluestem, prairie dropseed, and switchgrass.

Returning about 1530, with two dogs and no gun, the three of us proceeded to search for quail again. We flushed a single hen in the northwest corner of the April 2005 burn field. I thought this indicated a late brood was nearby and we followed her as requested. Shortly thereafter, we flushed a great horned owl from a tree. We worked largely in east/west movement and found a covey of about eight birds on the north side of the March burn at about 1730. I found a few droppings that indicated the covey was starting to roost for the night.

Seeing quail three times on opening day is an enormous improvement to seeing no quail during the first 60+ days of the 2004-2005 season on the same farm. All three flushes occurred on about 10 acres of land burned in 2005.

First flush was in the best common ragweed stand on the farm. Third flush was in close proximity to the same ragweed stand. Second flush came from a contiguous planting of 9-10 acres of annual lespedeza into



broomsedge and weak fescue. Six milo, milo/broomcorn, milo/buckwheat, and milo/catjang cowpeas food plots and one sunflower food plot were all searched at least twice and produced no flushes. A truer test of quail population increase will come later. I look forward to comparing my early January 2005 sighting of seven quail and my February 12, 2005 sighting of 12-15 quail with winter 2006 observations.

My two dogs and I still had fresh cover on the family farm to search when darkness came. Long term 40-year effort to provide at least some wildlife cover, recent intensive habitat management, and no hay harvest in 2005 produced this abundance.

Wishing to remain slightly anonymous, Located within 15 miles of Lake of the Ozarks

Almost 2 years ago, I left the fertile quail grounds of Northwest Missouri and moved to the Jefferson City area, landing in Osage County. While the countryside here is beautiful – to the human eye – it is virtually a quail desert. A landscape of fescue, thick forest, and cedars does not make a good recipe for quail habitat.

For over a year I had not seen quail on my 50 acre paradise and was beginning to doubt my chances at a successful quail restoration. In late 2004, I began spraying fescue, in 2005 I edgefeathered and did a small amount of timber stand improvement and burning. In October of 2005, I found my first covey on the farm with 12 birds using the edgefeathered area. During the first snow of December, a covey of 18 birds stayed around the house eating acorn pieces out of the drive and picking up crumbs under the bird feeders. Their coveyheadquarters was a couple of large downed cedar trees in the edge of the forest.

By restoring the 3 components of coveyheadquarters habitat on a portion of my property, it is quail friendly once again. The quail are back in spite of a flock of 50 turkey, several Cooper's hawks, a red fox, and a plethora of possum and skunk. Stay tuned to see if more habitat work will result in a huntable quail population on 50 acres at the edge of the Ozarks. **Bill White, Osage County**

Covey Headquarters Enters 5th Year of Publication!

This newsletter issue kicks off our 5th year of providing information about quail and quail management. Our first issue went to a few producers in 3 northwest Missouri counties. We now reach every county in the state and send several copies out of state – over 10,000 copies are printed quarterly. The newsletter is sent electronically to staff from MDC, NRCS, FSA, SWCD, DNR, and University of Missouri Extension. It is also posted on several websites. The main goal of the newsletter is to provide you with information to restore quail habitat. Keep sending us your letters. We want to know what has worked/not worked for you.

Since the first issue of the Covey Headquarters, great things have happened for quail. The Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative formed. MDC formed a Quail/Grassland Bird Leadership Council. Quail Forever, a new habitat organization formed (Missouri currently has 3 chapters). Cass and Andrew counties received a CPI Quail Grant from USDA. MDC created a quail plan for each of their eight regions which included the establishment of quail focus areas in every region (focus areas offer up to 90% cost share to improve quail habitat). Each MDC region provided quail training to interested landowners, MDC staff, and related agencies. Several quail DVD's have been produced and sent free to you. We will have another DVD (Important quail plants) available in 2006.

MU Extension developed 3 quail publications. Each provides useful information and links to quail habitat management practices. Check them out here - <http://muextension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/wildlife/> USDA has incorporated quail into most of their programs. WHIP and EQIP have extra ranking points if participants provide the basic quail habitat requirements. The CSP and EQIP programs have bobwhite quail habitat bundle incentives that allow participants to meet quail habitat needs on every field. New CCRP programs for pastureland – CP29 and CP30. Field borders can be established at the edge of croplands using the CP33 program. CRP mid-contract management went into effect during the 26th signup. It requires CRP participants to manage their grass by burning, disking, or herbicide suppression. This grass management makes CRP quail-friendly through the life of the CRP contract.

As you can see, great things have happened for quail in a short amount of time. What have you done for your quail in the last 5 years?

2006 Missouri Master Wildlifer Program

Wildlife Conservation on Private Lands

A Shortcourse for Private Landowners and Wildlife Enthusiasts

The Master Wildlifer Program is designed for landowners who are interested in including wildlife considerations into their current management objectives. Practicing land managers will find the course valuable in highlighting alternative management approaches for wildlife in forest and farm settings. Participants will learn about the biology and life history for a variety of wildlife species. In addition, special emphasis is being placed on managing habitats for wildlife species (including game species) that currently provide landowners with recreational opportunities on their property. Participants will obtain the knowledge and tools necessary to enhance habitat for a variety of wildlife species that can be enjoyed by themselves, family and friends, and outdoor recreationists.

The Master Wildlifer Program will be conducted live via Interactive TV (ITV), or on a taped-delay basis at participating MU Telecommunication and Extension Centers. ITV sites that will hold the program include the MU Extension Center in Cape Girardeau County, MU Extension NW Region Office in St. Joseph, Carroll County Extension Center via the Carroll County Public Library, Heinkel Building, University of Missouri—Columbia Campus, Salem TeleCenter, Nevada TeleCenter, Kirksville TeleCenter, and the Tri-Lakes TeleCenter in Reeds Springs.

Curriculum will include a Student Manual, video tapes, DVD's, and supplemental materials. A nominal registration fee will be charged, which will be determined by each location. The Program will provide landowners with approximately 24 hours of instruction. Shortcourse sessions include:

February 28.....Basic Ecological Principles and Introduction to Wildlife Management

March 2.....Ecology & Management of Bobwhite Quail and Grassland Birds

March 7.....Ecology & Management of White-tailed Deer

**March 9.....Ecology & Management of Eastern Wild Turkey
Managing Missouri's Forest Ecosystems for Wildlife**

March 14.....Waterfowl Biology and Management; Managing Missouri's Wetlands

March 16..... Managing Aquatic Habitats on Your Property: Ponds and Streams

**March 21..... Biology and Management of Missouri's Furbearers
Wildlife Damage Management**

**March 23.....Enhancing Wildlife Diversity on Your Property
Improving Wildlife Recreation Opportunities
Landowner Assistance Programs**

For more information about the 2006 Missouri Master Wildlifer Program contact:

Bob Pierce, Extension Wildlife Specialist at (573) 882-4337, piercer@missouri.edu
Matt Seek, Missouri Department of Conservation at (573) 751-4115, matt.seek@mdc.mo.gov
or contact your MU Extension Center for additional details.

Missouri Master Wildlifer is a cooperative educational program sponsored by University of Missouri Extension, MU School of Natural Resources and the Missouri Department of Conservation

Did You Know???

If you are a new landowner, you should always visit the USDA office located in your farm's county. You will need to update their files with your new contact information and will probably need a new farm plan. While you are there, you should always talk to someone about what programs are available and what you may be eligible for on your farm. USDA service centers are great places to gain information on soil conservation, wildlife management, crop production, and livestock production.

Mark Your Calendars

Quail Habitat Improvement Workshop

March 25, 2006 from 10AM-3PM at the Troy-MU Extension office in Lincoln County. There will be a morning classroom session followed by a field tour in the afternoon. Lunch is provided. Those interested must register at 636-528-4877 ext 3.

Prescribed Burn Workshops

February 4, 2006 from 9AM-noon at the Jasper County Annex building in Carthage, MO. Contact Randy Haas at 417-629-3423 for pre-registration, or further information.

February 16, 2006 6PM-9PM at the Missouri Department of Conservation Regional Office in St Joseph. Demo burn to follow on Saturday February 18th in Andrew County. Contact Sean Cleary at 816-271-3100 or Jeff Powelson at 816-364-3662 ext 122 for more information.

February 18, 2006 from 9AM-noon at the Barton County Memorial Hall in Lamar, MO. Contact Randy Haas at 417-629-3423 for pre-registration, or further information.

February 18, 2006 in Macon, MO contact Ted Seiler at 660-385-2616 ext. 3 for more information.

February 25, 2006 in Moberly, MO contact Ted Seiler at 660-385-2616 ext. 3 for more information.

Banquet

February 11, 2006 - Heartland Chapter Quail Unlimited of St. Joseph 4th Annual Banquet at the American Legion Hall in St. Joseph, MO. Contact Jeff Powelson 816-364-3662 ext 122 for more information.

2006 National Quail Unlimited Convention & Wildlife Expo

July 26 – 30, 2006 at the Westin Crown Center in Kansas City, MO. Help QU celebrate its 25th anniversary as America's leader in quail conservation. Visit www.qu.org/events for more details.

Check out these new websites –

<http://mdc.mo.gov/grownative/plantID/> - this site contains seedling, juvenile, and mature photos of grass and wildflower species. All of the species listed are typically in CRP mixes. Use this website to help you identify your grasses and wildflowers.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/wildlife/q09431.htm>

<http://extension.missouri.edu/explore/agguides/wildlife/q09432.htm> - great sites with links to great quail resources.

CPI Grant Update –

The CPI Grant for Andrew and Cass counties continues until July 2006. An amazing amount of quail habitat has hit the ground in less than one year – 152 CCRP buffer contracts covering over 1,900 acres. Over 30 miles of edge feathering has been completed adjacent to these buffers. Many buffer participants are already seeing the quail respond to the buffers that were planted in spring 2005. The edge feathering practices have been a very positive enhancement to the buffers. Several cooperators have stated seeing quail use the downed trees within 48 hours. Contact the Andrew (816-324-3196) and Cass (816-884-3391) USDA service centers if you own land in those counties and see what the CPI Grant can do for your quail.

Did You Know???

MDC's study of radio-tagged bobwhites in Knox and Macon Counties in the 1990's found that easy access to shrubby cover in winter is critical to bobwhites. In over hundreds of measurements, the average distance from quail locations to shrubby cover was only 69 feet. There is no better time to assess shrubby cover on your farm than after a fresh snowfall. After a snowfall get out and walk your farm. Do you see good quality shrubby areas? Are there dogwood/plum thickets and edge feathering? If not, get to work and provide some shrubby protection for your birds – it's critical for their survival!

Quail's Eye View –

Take a look at the following picture. This was taken at ground level in a shrub planting for quail. Look at all the bare ground within the planting. It is easy for a covey of quail to move under this protective overhead cover, but tough for a predator to get through. This shrub planting is a mixture of shrub lespedeza, hazelnut, and aromatic sumac. The shrubs are about 5 feet high and provide excellent cover throughout the year. Many of you have planted shrubs or have existing wild plum/dogwood thickets for quail. They should look like this picture at ground level. If they are choked with fescue and brome, they are essentially useless to quail. These grasses can be sprayed with glyphosate when they green up this spring, but before the shrubs break dormancy. Think like a quail and start managing your farm at ground level. If your birds can't walk to all of their habitat types, they are probably flying somewhere else.



Spring Covey Headquarters Calendar

March

For quail, do not burn thick stands of native grass after March 15
Spray fescue and brome in your shrubby cover before shrub bud break
Plant shrubs for quail now through May
Burn cool season CRP grasses March 15 – May 1
Apply herbicide to set back cool season CRP grass March 15 – May 15

April

Burn fescue and brome to severely stunt grass
Conduct Spring bobwhite whistle counts April 15 – May 1
Till and fertilize food plots

May

Bobwhites begin nesting – **do not mow nesting cover now through August**
Plant food plots in May for best results
Apply herbicide to set back warm season CRP grass in May and June



The Covey Headquarters Newsletter
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED